

1. A method for managing the movement of interoffice items including:
entering each item to be sent into a computer system, each said item having a tag;
the system generating and storing a record for each item;
the tag for each item being utilized at selected points in transport of the item to control
said transport; and
the system querying the record for an item in response to a query concerning the item
from an authorized system user to determine a response to the query and providing the
response to the user.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 including the system being operative in
response to said entering step to generate a tag to be affixed to the item.
3. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein each said tag includes an item ID
which is at least one of machine readable and human readable.
4. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein the item ID appears on the tag in bar
code.
5. A method as claimed in claim 1 including updating said record for an item as
the item reaches at least certain points in said transport.
6. A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein a query for an item is as to the current
status thereof, the system utilizing the updated record to respond to the query.
7. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the query is one of a query from an
item sender as to all items the sender has sent over a selected period and a query from
an item recipient as to all items sent to the recipient over a selected period, the system
looking at appropriate fields of item records to respond to such queries.
8. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein senders of items include entities
within the office organization and entities outside the office organization, the sender
entering the item into the system for entities within the organization and a mail room
person entering the item into the system for entities outside the organization.

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9. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein an electronic message is automatically sent to at least one entity when an item is entered into the system.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein the electronic message is an e-mail message.

11. A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein the electronic message is sent to an office mail room.

12. A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein each office entity may establish preferences, including that the entity is to receive an electronic message when an item is entered into the system on which the entity is a recipient, the system sending an electronic message to an entity establishing such preference each time it is the recipient of an entered item.

13. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein each office entity can enter selected preferences into the system, the system storing the preferences and utilizing the preferences to control selected operations involving the entity.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein the preferences include selected information on the entity, the information being automatically entered into appropriate fields of a record for an item on which the entity is at least one of sender and recipient.

15. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein the preferences include selected conditions under which the entity is to receive messages concerning an item on which the entity is one of sender and recipient, the system sending a status message to the entity when preferences conditions are satisfied.

16. A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein said selected conditions include at least one of the item reaching at least one selected point in an item transport and the nature of the item being transported.

17. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein a user can store as preferences at least one of a proxy address and a forwarding address for at least selected mail items; and wherein when a mail item is received which is a selected mail item with the user as recipient, the system routes the mail item to the appropriate proxy/forwarding address.

18. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the system has access to current addresses of office users; and

wherein, when a mail item is received with an address, the system checks the address for the user against the current address for the user and sends the item to the current address even if different from the address on the mail item.

19. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the office is part of an organization having at least one directory of entities within the organization; and

wherein the system utilizes said at least one directory in generating at least one of said records and said tags.

20. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein an ordering entity at one office location can enter an order for an item to be shipped to the ordering entity by a sending entity at a second location, the order causing a tag for the item to be generated at the second location for use in sending the item to the ordering entity.

21. A method as claimed in claim 20 wherein the system generates a record for the item and updates the record as the item is shipped; and

wherein the ordering party can query the system concerning the order, the system utilizing the updated record for the item to respond to the query.

22. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the system sends an electronic message to at least one of an item sender and an item recipient when the item is delivered to the recipient.

23. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein each item is to have a tag with an ID code which is both human readable and machine readable; and

wherein, if an item received at an office mail room is detected as not having an ID code in both forms, the system determines the ID code for the item and adds the ID code to the item in each missing form.

24. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein, when an item reaches an office mail room, the tag for the item is read and any information on the tag which is not in the record for the item is added to the record.

25. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein some of said items are to be sent to entities outside the office by a carrier having its own tags and ID codes;

wherein said entering step is performed by a sender of the item;

wherein each item in its transport reaches an office mail room; and

wherein the record for the item is utilized in conjunction with carrier software to generate a carrier tag with a carrier ID code.

26. A method as claimed in claim 25 wherein the entering step includes the sender designating the carrier to be used for the item, the entering step by the sender causing a tag to be generated for the item which tag is a carrier tag having a carrier ID code.

27. A method as claimed in claim 25 wherein the carrier tag with the carrier ID is generated at the office mail room and attached to the item.

28. A method as claimed in claim 1 including the system utilizing said records to generate reports in response to requests for such reports from selected authorized system users

29. A method for users of a mail system to selectively track movement of items through the system including:

each user entering preferences into the system as to selected conditions under which the user is to receive electronic messages concerning an item on which the user is one of a sender and a recipient;

the system tracking movement of items through the system; and

the system sending an electronic status message to the user when one of the user preferences conditions is detected as being satisfied.

30. A method as claimed in claim 29 wherein at least one of the sender and the recipient of an item is automatically sent an electronic status message when the item is delivered.

31. A method as claimed in claim 28 wherein a mail item recipient can query the system for all items that have been sent to the recipient over a specified time interval, the system providing an electronic message to the recipient containing relevant mail items in response to such query.

32. A method as claimed in claim 28 wherein a mail item sender can query the system for all items that have been sent by the sender over a specified time interval, the system providing an electronic message to the sender containing relevant mail items in response to such query.

33. A system for managing the movement of interoffice items including:
a plurality of terminals at which a sender enters into the system at least one of an item to be sent and a query to the system;

a first mechanism operative in response to an item being entered for generating a tag to be affixed to the item;

a second mechanism operative in response to an item being entered into the system for generating and storing a record for the item;

a third mechanism operative at selected points in transport of an item in response to the tag for the item to control said transport; and

a fourth mechanism by which the system, utilizing the record for an item, obtains a response to a query from an authorized system user relating to the item and provides the response to the user.

34. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein said first mechanism generates on each said tag an item ID which is at least one of machine readable and human readable.

35. A system as claimed in claim 34 wherein each said item ID is printed on said tag in bar code.

36. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein said second mechanism is operative to update the record for an item as the item reaches at least certain points in said transport.

37. A system as claimed in claim 36 wherein said fourth mechanism uses the updated record for an item to respond to a query concerning status for the item

38. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein the query is one of a query from an item sender as to all items the sender has sent over a selected period and a query from an item recipient as to all items sent to the recipient over a selected period, the fourth mechanism looking at appropriate fields of item records to respond to such queries.

39. A system as claimed in claim 33 including a fifth mechanism for selectively sending electronic messages to system users in response to the detection of selected events with respect to an item.

40. A system as claimed in claim 39 wherein said message is an e-mail message.

41. A system as claimed in claim 39 wherein the fifth mechanism sends an electronic message to at least one of the item sender and the item recipient when the item is delivered to the recipient.

42. A system as claimed in claim 33 including a sixth mechanism which facilitates the entry by system users of selected preferences, the storage of the preferences and the utilizing of the preferences to control selected operations of the system which operations involve the user.

43. A system as claimed in claim 42 wherein the preferences include selected information on the user, the second mechanism automatically entering the information into appropriate fields of a record for which the user is at least one of the sender and the recipient.

44. A system as claimed in claim 42 wherein the preferences include selected conditions under which the user is to receive messages concerning an item on which the user is one of sender and recipient, the fifth mechanism sending a status message to the entity when preferences conditions are satisfied.

45. A system as claimed in claim 44 wherein said selected conditions include at least one of the item reaching at least one selected point in an item transport and the nature of the item being transported.

46. A system as claimed in claim 33 wherein the office is part of an organization having at least one directory of entities within the organization; and

wherein at least one of said first mechanism and said second mechanism utilizes said at least one directory in generating said records and said tags respectively.

47. Apparatus which permits users of a mail system which tracks movement of items through the system to determine the movement status of selected items including:

terminals at which a user can enter into the apparatus preferences as to selected conditions under which the user is to receive electronic messages concerning an item on which the user is one of a sender and a recipient;;

a memory storing said preferences; and

a mechanism which sends an electronic status message to the user when one of the user preferences conditions is detected as being satisfied.

48. Apparatus as claimed in claim 47 wherein said mechanism automatically sends an electronic status message to at least one of the sender and the recipient when an item is delivered.

49. Apparatus as claimed in claim 47 wherein a mail item recipient can query the system for all items that have been sent to the recipient over a specified time interval; and wherein said mechanism provides an electronic message to the recipient containing relevant mail items in response to such query.

50. Apparatus as claimed in claim 47 wherein a mail item sender can query the system for all items that have been sent by the sender over a specified time interval; and wherein said mechanism provides an electronic message to the sender containing relevant mail items in response to such query.

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